

ADOBE Premiere Pro 2

★★★★★

£743 inc VAT

Adobe Premiere was once the obvious choice for amateur and semi-professional video editing on the PC, but more affordable, equally powerful competition from Avid Liquid and Sony Vegas has shaken things up. Premiere Pro 2 is a significant overhaul, with new features affecting almost every aspect of the software.

The interface looks much neater than before, with docked panels replacing the floating windows of previous versions. New effects include a colour corrector that goes beyond any others we've seen, although its precision is matched by its complexity. The Lighting Effects filter provides up to five spotlights with which to illuminate clips and combines fine control with high-quality results. This effect benefits from the new 32-bit internal colour processing, which helps maintain detail in highlights and shadows.

Our favourite new features will be familiar to Avid Liquid users. Bezier curves are available for all effects automation rather than just motion paths, providing precise control of the speed and path between key frames for fluid object motion. We also like the elegant handling of up to four synchronised streams for multi-camera editing; once set up, cutting between them in real time is achieved with keyboard short cuts. However, the setup process is cryptic.

DVD authoring comprises more than just burning a menu-less DVD from the timeline, but not much more. You can customise the menu templates to a reasonable extent, but disc navigation options are basic. Macromedia Flash Video has been added to the export options, while the Media Encoder window now includes cropping and Scale To Fit options. There's still no MPEG4 support, though.

Version 1.5 used the Cineform codec for smooth handling of HDV footage, but for version 2 Adobe has reverted to providing direct support for HDV's native format, MPEG2 TS. This is surprising, as it isn't easy for software to manipulate this heavily compressed format. However, Adobe appears to have cracked it, with reasonable preview performance. The DV

preview engine has been overhauled, too. It managed four DV streams with fewer sporadic stutters than version 1.5 suffered on our Athlon 64 3000+ PC. Uncompressed HD and SD are supported, as are uncompressed digital video transfers via SDI using the AJA Xena HS interface.

COMBINED EFFORTS

Premiere Pro now works better alongside other Adobe applications. Assets can be transferred between Premiere, Photoshop, Audition and After Effects from the right-click menu, with dynamic linking to keep any changes reflected in all programs. Clip Notes is a new feature that embeds video into a PDF, whereupon clients can add comments that appear back in Premiere Pro at the relevant position on the timeline.

Despite all these improvements, we're unconvinced that Premiere Pro is worth twice as much as Avid Liquid or Sony Vegas. It's arguably the best of the three; Liquid's interface is lumpy in places, while Vegas's motion control and effect automation is underpowered. Premiere Pro's greatest strength is simply that it doesn't have any notable weaknesses. However, Liquid is leagues ahead in terms of preview performance, while Vegas is the easiest to use and has the most comprehensive DVD-authoring capabilities.

As usual, you're better off buying Premiere as part of a bundle. Adobe Production Studio adds Photoshop CS2 and After Effects 7 Standard for around £1,080 including VAT. Production Studio Premium costs around £1,540 and includes Photoshop, After Effects Professional, Audition 2, Encore DVD 2 and Illustrator CS2. Either of these bundles is a sound investment for

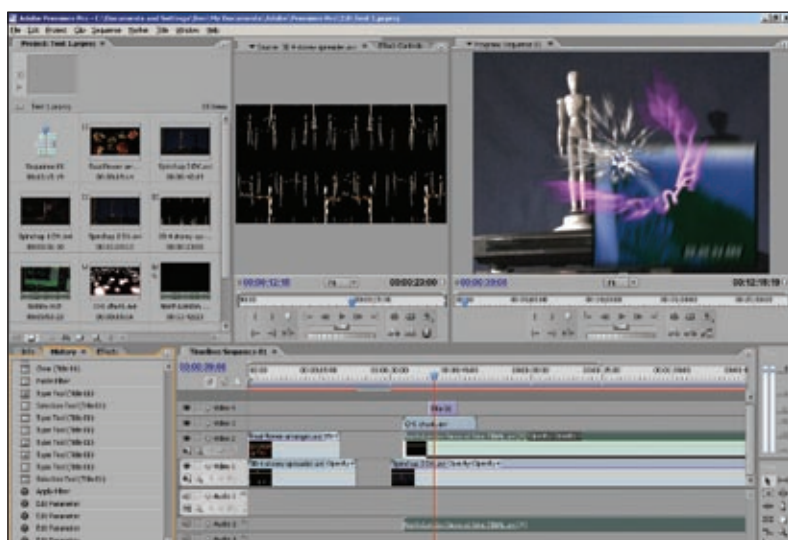
professional users, particularly considering the tight integration of the applications. But for amateurs, the increased value doesn't change the fact that these are phenomenal amounts to spend on software. Even the upgrade is overpriced at £200; for those who are new to advanced video editing, Liquid or Vegas are better value.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Packed with new features
- ✓ Harmonious with other Adobe programs
- ✗ Prohibitively expensive

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP SP2, 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM (3.4GHz, 2GB for HDV), 4GB disk space, 1,280x1,024-pixel monitor PRODUCT CODE 25520380 SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.adobe.co.uk



◀ Docked windows make Premiere look neater and quicker to use

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q Your reviews of video editing software often mention key frame effects. What are they, and why are they so important?

A An effect, just like video, is a set of frames that, when played back at speed, forms an animation. Using key frame effects you control exactly how this animation looks.

Key frame effects work by letting you design and control a complete frame of the animation, such as the first and last frame. The computer then generates the frames in between. The more key frames you use, the more work it is to generate an effect, but the results are also closer to what you imagined.

If you're not happy with the path that the PC-generated frames have taken, you can introduce more key frames to finely control your effects.

David Ludlow
Reviews Editor



david@computershopper.co.uk

PINNACLE Studio Plus 10 Titanium Edition

★★★

£63 inc VAT

We reviewed Pinnacle Studio Plus 10 in *What's New, Shopper* February 2006 and thought it was a well-conceived video editor for home users, but it was crippled by stability problems. The Titanium Edition reviewed here includes extra features that were previously available as paid extras, as well as various updates that bring it (and Studio Plus) up to version 10.5.

We were pleasantly surprised by the power and versatility of the extra effects bundle. There are some interesting colour processes, such as Shift Channels for mapping RGB colour channels to different colours, luminance or saturation. Other highlights include sophisticated distortion effects. Best of all is the extensive user control available for each effect; the fire simulation has 21 parameters to help it integrate convincingly with your source footage. Along with the ability to morph effects settings using key frames, a feature that was introduced in Studio Plus 10, these extra effects boost the software's scope for creative editing.

Titanium Edition also includes MPEG4 support with templates for export to DivX format and iPod and PlayStation Portable (PSP) players. Doing so is

quick and easy, with the PSP's awkward filename conventions handled automatically. Unencrypted DVDs can also be imported to the timeline and converted to MPEG4.

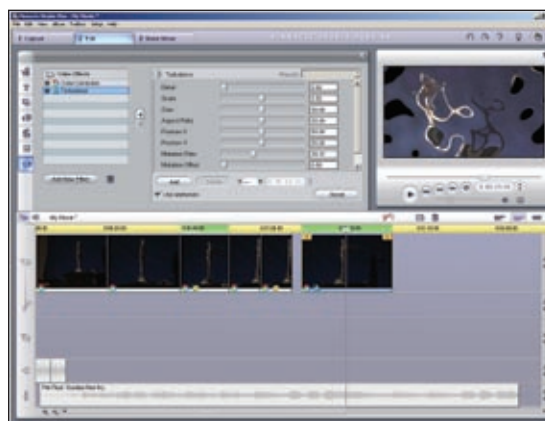
Studio Plus 10 introduced an error-reporting module that could send crash reports back to Pinnacle, similar to the one built into Windows XP. We thought it encouraging that Pinnacle was trying to address the stability problems that have plagued Studio for as long as we can remember. However, despite a long list of bug fixes, version 10.5 shows no clear sign of improvement. We suffered at least one crash in every session, with no obvious pattern as to what was causing them.

We noticed a number of recurring problems, too. HDV cameras are supported, along with various high-definition output formats, and we had no difficulty generating these HD files. But there appeared to be no more image detail contained within these files than with the standard-definition PAL export templates, despite using high-resolution source footage and text overlay.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Impressive new effects
- ✓ Easy export to iPod and PSP
- ✗ Chronic stability problems

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM (2.4GHz, 1GB recommended), 1GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 202262377
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.pinnaclesys.com



▲ New effects look great and come with extensive user control

Elsewhere, previews of certain real-time effects were spoiled by random flashes, although these disappeared once Studio's background rendering had kicked in, generating a temporary file of the clip with the effect in place. Weirder still, frames from other projects occasionally flashed on to the preview window, presumably a problem with background rendering getting its cached files mixed up. Worst was that resizing a video clip and replacing the soundtrack caused previews to stutter so much that the software became unusable. Background rendering fixed the problem, but we shouldn't have to wait 10 minutes after performing such a simple edit on an Athlon 64 PC to continue editing.

Studio Plus could be a great product, and Titanium Edition adds some welcome features. However, until it stops crashing and misbehaving, we can't recommend it.

Ben Pitt

Also consider...

MICROSOFT Works Suite 2006

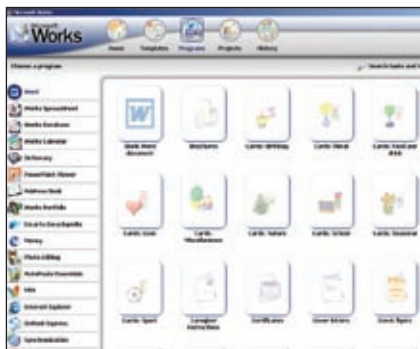
★★★★★
 £63 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!

BEST BUY Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and is very business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.



OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or above, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com **DETAILS** www.microsoft.com/worksuite ✓ Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta ✗ Old version of Word **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2006

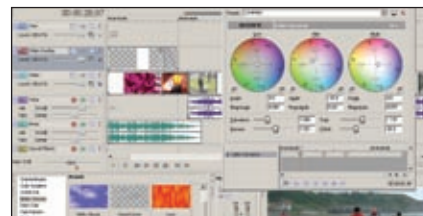
SONY Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

★★★★★
 £73 inc VAT

BEST BUY Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition Video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 **SUPPLIER** www.savastore.com **DETAILS** www.sonymedia.com
 ✓ Lots of powerful new features ✗ DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2005



ROXIO

MyDVD 8 Premier



£50 inc VAT

Sonic's MyDVD is now published under the Roxio brand. Running the software presents you with a launcher program that arranges tasks into various categories. It's the same interface used by Roxio's disc-burning suite Easy Media Creator and, with Creator Essentials already installed on our test PC, the two packages nestled in the same launcher. Sadly, Creator Essentials didn't seem to like its bedfellow and its CD-burning module packed up completely. For the purposes of this review, we uninstalled both programs and reinstalled MyDVD.

Roxio's task-based approach blurs the lines between the different programs in its suites, but MyDVD Premier includes much more than just MyDVD. VideoWave takes care of video editing in its usual clumsy way, while the excellent Media Manager pops up when importing files or can be launched as a standalone application.

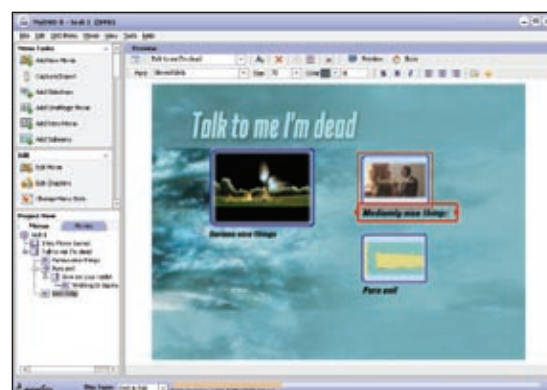
We usually don't have much patience for bundled browser programs, but this one is fast to use and catalogues media files in various meaningful ways.

MyDVD is easy and fun to use, but it's a little light on menu templates. Although there's

reasonable scope to customise them, you can't get away from having a clip thumbnail for each button. We had no problems importing a range of video formats and resolutions, including widescreen footage, but MPEG4 isn't supported. Disc-navigation options comprise creating menus and submenus and filling them as you please, but the menu structure is strictly hierarchical. Slideshows are handled elegantly.

With high-definition video on the horizon, Roxio is keen to be at the forefront of this technology, though the next-generation DVD formats, Blu-ray and HD DVD, are yet to become available. For the meantime, MyDVD can edit HD footage from HDV cameras, HD TV broadcasts (which have only recently become available) and

DivX HD files and burn the results to DVD-ROM in DivX HD. This is a shrewd stop-gap for those desperate to watch footage from their new HDV camera on their new HD TV, though hardly any set-top players support DivX HD; we found 15 at www.videohelp.com/s database of players, including Buffalo's



▲ MyDVD offers reasonable scope to customise DVD menus

LinkTheater PC-P3LWG/DVD (see *What's New, Shopper* July 2005), which is available for around £160. We'd recommend running edited HDV back to tape and plugging the camera into the TV until HD DVD and Blu-ray players, drives and authoring software become available. We'd recommend using other software to edit HDV, as VideoWave is basic and slow. It seemed unwilling to generate DivX HD at 25 frames per second (fps), defaulting to the US standard of 30fps.

For sophisticated DVD authoring on a budget, nothing comes close to Sony DVD Architect Studio 3, which is bundled with Vegas Movie Studio 6 for around £75. If MyDVD Premier's suite appeals, Easy Media Creator 8 might be better; this bundles MyDVD, VideoWave and Media Manager with backup software, basic photo editing and more for £60 including VAT. For friendly, low-cost DVD authoring, try Ulead DVD MovieFactory 5 (see page 52).

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ More authoring flexibility needed
- ✗ Video editing is frustrating

DVD-AUTHORING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP SP2, 1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 300058012
SUPPLIER www.roxio.co.uk
DETAILS www.roxio.co.uk

Also consider...

MAGIX

Audio Cleaning Lab 10 Deluxe



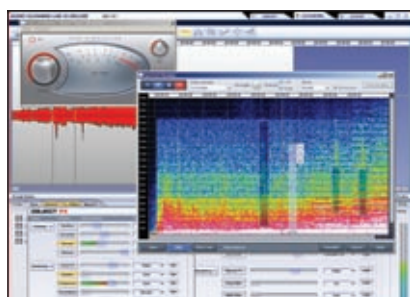
£29 inc VAT



Magix's Audio Cleaning Lab converts vinyl and cassette recordings to digital, but it's also well suited for preparing your own music for public consumption.

The Spectral Cleaning feature helps remove unwanted noises, such as coughs, from recordings. For musicians, it's a must.

AUDIO RESTORATION Requires Windows 98 or above, 450MHz processor, 64MB RAM PRODUCT CODE MAG0010 DETAILS www.magix.com ✓ Superb audio-optimisation tools ✗ Effect chain order is fixed FULL REVIEW May 2006



AVANQUEST

RadioTracker Premium



£20 inc VAT



Finding new music and building a large MP3 collection is a difficult and expensive task. With Radiotracker Premium you can do both for just the cost of the software. It monitors internet radio stations that broadcast in MP3 format and downloads songs to your PC.

You have control over the genre and quality that you're interested in, but the music you'll get remains a surprise.

Only a few of our downloads were incomplete or had the start of another track at the end. As a way of grabbing new music, this is well worth the money.



MP3 RIPPING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space, broadband internet connection SUPPLIER Avanquest 01752 895100 DETAILS www.avanquest.co.uk ✓ Gets lots of tracks quickly ✗ Some settings are confusing FULL REVIEW Apr 2006

KASPERSKY

Anti-Virus 2006



£28 inc VAT



Kaspersky's Anti-Virus scans all the usual areas for threats including email and web traffic, as well as your hard disk. It performed perfectly in our tests, detecting every sample that we threw at it. If you need to clean an infected PC, the option to create a bootable scanning CD is invaluable. It's well priced, simple to use and the top-notch protection will keep your PC safe.

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, 150MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 50MB disk space SUPPLIER Kaspersky 08700 113461 DETAILS www.kaspersky.com ✓ Effective detection and handy extra features FULL REVIEW Jun 2006



STUDIOLINE Photo Classic 3

★★★★

£43 inc VAT (download)

Adobe's Photoshop Elements has been so successful because it manages to combine powerful photo-editing tools with an ease of use that allows even complete novices to get good results quickly. The developers of StudioLine could learn a lot from that approach. While this image database software provides some powerful features, its ease of use is woefully poor.

Things start off reasonably well, with a simple window that lists a number of primary tasks from which you can choose, such as importing photos into the program's image archive, editing individual photos or creating a slideshow. However, even simple tasks such as adding photos to your archive are complicated by the confusing interface and a reliance on obscure jargon.

Select the Load option to import some photos, and a browser window appears that allows you to locate your photos and import them. Unfortunately, the browser was obscured by a Hint palette that attempted to explain how to use the browser. When we tried to move the Hint palette out of the way, a bizarre set of arrows popped up in various

parts of the screen, leaving us wondering what was going on. When we located our photo collection and tried to add it to the program's archive, we were asked whether we wanted to create 'proxies' for our photos. We had to head to the online help files to work out what was going on.

Fortunately, things started to make more sense once we'd managed to import some of our photos. The central part of the screen is used to display previews of your photo collection. There's a panel running down the left-hand side of the screen, along with a series of buttons that allow you to switch between various sets of tools. Click the Image Toolbox button, and this panel displays the main photo-editing tools including options such as red-eye removal, exposure correction, colour balance and a limited selection of special effects filters. There's a good set of basic editing tools, but StudioLine can't match the more varied artistic effects and filters found in rivals such as Photoshop Elements or Corel's Paint Shop Pro.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Powerful photo-collection organiser
- ✗ Clumsy interface design
- ✗ Limited photo-editing features

IMAGE-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 150MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.studioline.net
DETAILS www.studioline.net



▲ StudioLine has some useful photo-editing tools, but its interface is complex and confusing

Again, the interface gets in the way. Each time you click on an editing tool, an additional set of options for each tool appears in a separate panel down the right-hand side of the screen. But instead of resetting itself for each new tool, the right-hand panel piles feature upon feature. After clicking on a few tools to see how they worked, we found this right-hand panel awash with so many different options we decided to quit the program and start all over again.

StudioLine has its strengths: its powerful search tools and ability to organise large collections of photos. Serious photographers with large libraries of photos can download the trial version to try it. However, its photo-editing tools are unremarkable, and it's hard to recommend it while its interface remains so chaotic.

Cliff Joseph

Also consider...

SYMANTEC Norton Ghost 10

★★★★★

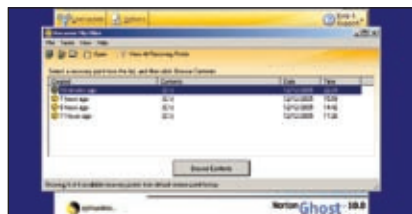
£35 inc VAT



It stands to reason that, at some point, your PC will go wrong and you'll need to turn to backups to get it working again. Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 aims to make this task as easy as possible.

For starters, it automatically makes a complete image of your PC, operating system and all. When you restore an image, you get all your data and all your settings back the way you want them. This is an essential program for PC owners.

DISK-IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 160MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 10439689-IN SUPPLIER www.savastore.com DETAILS www.symantec.co.uk
✓ Powerful and easy to use ✗ Restore CD changed our system clock FULL REVIEW Apr 2006



MACROMEDIA Dreamweaver 8

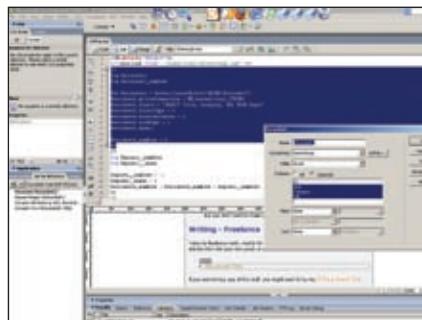
★★★★★

£316 inc VAT



If you have anything to do with developing professional websites, Dreamweaver 8 is the best £316 you'll ever spend. Miles ahead of the competition, it has everything. Whether you design the look of a site or incorporate dynamic data, Dreamweaver has the tools you need. It's too expensive for the home user, though.

WEB-DESIGN SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 650MB disk space, 1,024x768-pixel display SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.macromedia.com ✓ Improved CSS interface ✗ Too expensive for most home users FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



MICROSOFT Visual Studio 2005 Express

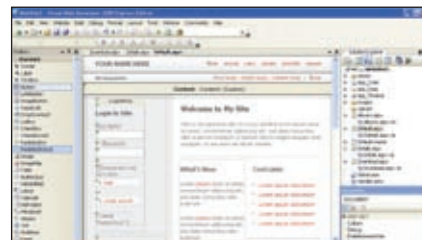
★★★★★

Free

Visual Studio 2005 Express is Microsoft's free development tool. There are several versions catering for all developers including Windows and web. With the free SQL Server 2005 Express Edition, you can use these tools to create dynamic websites.

Brilliantly implemented and very powerful, Visual Studio provides enough for all but professional developers.

PROGRAMMING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 600MHz processor, 192MB RAM, 500MB disk space
SUPPLIER Microsoft 08706 010100 DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk ✓ Free and very powerful ✗ A lot to learn FULL REVIEW Jun 2006



ULEAD DVD MovieFactory 5

★★★★★

£27 inc VAT

DVD MovieFactory is one of the most affordable DVD-authoring packages on the market, so we were surprised that it's the first one we've seen that supports the next-generation optical disc formats, Blu-ray Disc (BD) and HD DVD. Perhaps this is an impressive achievement, but we can't be sure; recorders and players aren't yet available, so it's not possible to test these features. Still, DVD MovieFactory 5 gives an interesting glimpse into these new formats, with support for up to 1,920x1,080 resolution in MPEG2 format.

However, the software merely scrapes the surface of the formats' possibilities, with no mention of AVC or VC-1 video formats or Java-based menus, all of which are included in the BD and HD DVD specifications. It appears that Ulead has been officially premature in its support for BD; the company recently announced it has removed BD support from DVD MovieFactory 5 and will reinstate it after a "verification process".

These new formats are capable of sophisticated menu systems, but DVD MovieFactory 5 manages to eke some extra mileage out of the DVD Video format. DVD menus only ever consist of an image

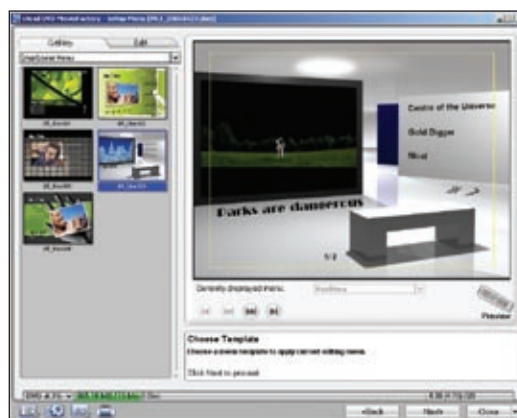
or video clip with block-colour highlight masks to show which button is highlighted. However, Ulead has used various behind-the-scenes disc-navigation tricks to give the impression of animated menus that float into view, change depending on which button is highlighted and dissolve into the selected title. Commercial DVDs employ similar techniques. It's possible to achieve them manually using high-end authoring software, but this is the first time we've seen it in low-cost software. The result is classy menu templates that go beyond the usual video thumbnails, but are no harder to create.

If you want something simpler, there are conventional thumbnail- and text-based templates, too. We'd prefer more than five or six of each type, though. Template elements can be mixed and matched, and the layout of the various elements in a menu is freely editable. However, disc navigation is fixed. You can't decide how many links are included per menu page. Adding chapter points to video titles generates a chapter selection menu in place of a direct link from the main menu, whether you like it or not.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Classy menu animation
- ✓ Good value
- ✗ HD format support premature

DVD-AUTHORING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 512MB RAM, 900MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** 300063118 **SUPPLIER** www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.ulead.co.uk



▲ Menu templates include rollover buttons and transitions between menus and videos

There's a generous helping of ancillary features, including attractive slideshows with Pan and Zoom effects and transitions. A simple utility burns data, audio CD and DVD Video discs simply by dropping files into a bin-style window. Video can be transferred straight from DV camera to DVD Video disc, and there's support for DVD+VR (but not -VR) format for on-disc editing. High-definition support extends to recording from a variety of HD TV sources, which should become applicable in the UK before the end of the year.

The lack of disc-navigation options is a shame, because otherwise it's hard to fault DVD MovieFactory 5, especially at this price. Ulead may have jumped the gun with its HD media support, but it shows the company's commitment to bringing HD authoring to the masses as quickly as possible.

Ben Pitt

Also consider...

3AM LABS LogMeIn

★★★★★

Free; Professional edition \$13 (around £7) per month

BEST BUY If you've ever needed to access your PC while you've been away, LogMeIn is just the software for you. The free version gives you full remote control of your PC over the internet and works brilliantly.

The Professional version adds support for file transfers and guest invitations, and lets you use email to send links to files on your PC. It's an excellent piece of software for anyone who does a lot of remote work.

REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, Internet Explorer, broadband internet connection **SUPPLIER** www.3amlabs.com **DETAILS** www.logmein.com ✓ Simple remote control of a PC ✗ Java application not very fast **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2005



MOZILLA Firefox 1.0

★★★★★

Free

Firefox 1.0 is by far the best web browser that we have ever used. Introducing advanced features such as tabbed browsing and support for RSS feeds, it is leaps and bounds ahead of Microsoft's Internet Explorer. When you also consider that it's better at rendering pages and is free, there's little excuse not to use it.

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 52MB disk space **SUPPLIER** www.getfirefox.com ✓ Improved secure browsing ✗ Doesn't work with all websites **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2005



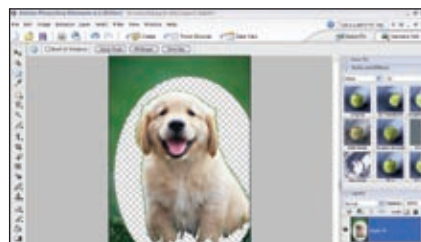
ADOBE Photoshop Elements 4.0

★★★★★

£68 inc VAT; upgrade £58

BEST BUY The latest version of Photoshop Elements blows the competition away. It has stunning new organisation features, including the ability to search for photos that contain people's faces. With the best range of editing features on the market and a low price, this program is one for all photo-editing enthusiasts.

PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 800MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** AD07071A **SUPPLIER** www.microanvika.com **DETAILS** www.adobe.co.uk ✓ Impressive photo-editing tools ✗ Clunky online help system **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2006



GSP

Family Tree Maker Deluxe 2006

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT

There's a certain appeal in researching your family's history, whether it's to see if you're related to someone famous or just to find out where you came from. Organising all the information that you discover can be difficult, and GSP's Family Tree Maker tries to simplify the process.

The package's main program helps you organise all the genealogical data you've collected efficiently. In addition, you get a three-disc set of data derived from the 1851 UK census, as well as local parish records for England, Scotland and Wales. You can get census information dating back to 1841 for free online at www.ancestry.co.uk, but the parish records discs contain more detailed local information. The package comes with a free 90-day subscription to Ancestry.co.uk's premium service, which enables you to search registries of births, marriages and deaths up to the present day. It's accessible from within the Family Tree Maker program, enabling you to fill in missing family members and details as you go along. However, if you have a common surname, you might have to wade through a lot of matches before you find the right one.

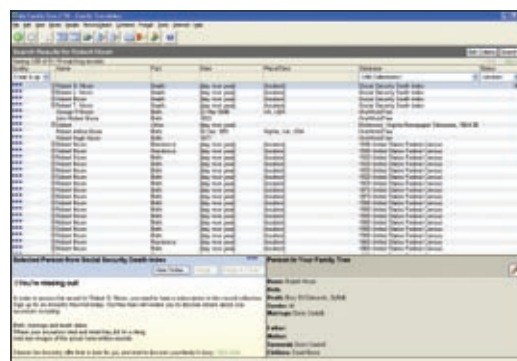
Annoyingly, there are a few leftovers that remind you the program originated in the States: matches with US records automatically float to the top of the list, even if

you've specified UK-specific details in your person search. To refine things, you need to save a customised set of databases in which to look up results.

TREE'S A CROWD

As you collect information, you can enter it directly into a family tree by establishing the relationship – son, husband, father and so on – of the person you've found to an existing member or members of your tree. This process highlighted one serious weakness in the program's method of data entry. While it's possible to record marriages, even down to the day and date, and include wedding photos in your family scrapbook, there's no straightforward way to indicate divorces or remarriages in a way that accommodates step-parents and half-siblings. You either get to associate existing children with the previous marriage or this one, making it difficult for anyone looking at the chart to work out the new family groupings.

You can display your family tree in the standard, top-down ancestors-to-present manner or choose an alternative view such as the creepy-sounding Pedigree. This places a chosen individual at the head of the tree and works back through their direct lineage. Notes, captions, photos and other pictures can be



▲ You can search for your family members online

attached to any member of the tree. Clicking on an individual brings up their personal properties, which can be used to store details that even include medical records.

One thing Family Tree Maker can't get you out of is legwork. While the included resources and online subscription help you trace most British ancestors back to the 1841 census, if your roots are in Ireland there's no substitute for detective work. A fire at the Dublin Public Records Office in 1922 destroyed most centrally held documents, making Irish genealogy a matter of leafing through local parish registers; much the same as tracing pre-1841 British ancestry.

Family Tree Maker, together with the free online subscription to Ancestry.co.uk that comes with this package, provides substantial help in tracing back five or six generations of your family. It makes the job of presenting your results a breeze, enabling you to analyse relationships and add snapshots and other details quickly. With a DVD included to help you with the next stage of your search, Family Tree Maker provides everything you need to get started on your family tree.

James Nixon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lots of information
- ✓ Helps organise your family
- ✗ Hard to display extended families

GENEALOGY SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 SE or above, 333MHz processor, 128MB RAM
PRODUCT CODE Family Tree Maker
SUPPLIER GSP
DETAILS www.gsp.cc

BYTEK SYSTEMS

Diino

★★★★★

From free to £40 per month

We've seen online storage before, but Diino is a little different, as it's all about sharing your files with others on the internet. You can get a free 20MB account for a trial, but there's a range of other storage options starting at £2.99 a month for 1GB up to £40 a month for 100GB.

Access to Diino is through the free client. There are two versions. One is a full installation for your home PC. The other can be run from a USB flash drive, so you can carry it around and use Diino on PCs where you don't have installation rights. The client connects to your shared storage space, which has several predefined directories that mimic the contents of My Documents, including My Video and My Pictures. You can also create your own directories.

To upload files, simply drag and drop them on to the client. Upload speeds will depend on your internet connection. As most broadband services have upload speeds of around 256Kbit/s, it can take a while to upload a large number of files. Once your files are uploaded, you can choose to share them with your friends and family. The first way to do this is to share an entire folder. You have a choice of read/write access, read access and a streaming option, which lets your friends stream your MP3s. The streaming works only

with MP3 files, though, so it's no use if your music collection is in WMA or AAC format.

When you share a folder you give it a password, which your friends use to access the service. However, you can't share two folders using the same password. If you want to share multiple



▲ Diino lets you share your music collection, so your friends can stream directly from the service

folders, you have to email multiple passwords for them. If you want to share a single file, you can email your friends a link to it. Each link is valid for just 10 viewings or 24 hours. Finally, your friends can email you with attachments, which are stored in your inbox.

Diino works well and its 1GB service is competitive, but we would have liked to see wider music-streaming support and the ability simply to share multiple folders.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lets you share files and folders
- ✓ Good value
- ✗ One folder per password

FILE-SHARING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, 128MB RAM, 5MB hard disk space, broadband internet connection
PRODUCT CODE Diino
SUPPLIER www.diino.co.uk
DETAILS www.diino.co.uk